

PROLOGUE

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO LOVES BOATING. HE LEARNED TO WATER-SKI before he learned his alphabet, and the years he spent gliding across the lake were obvious to anyone who witnessed his expert form, whether on choppy or smooth water. One of his first purchases as an adult was a ski boat. Through the years he would save his money and gradually upgrade until he ended up with the one he owned when we started dating. It was well used when he purchased it, but he had meticulously repaired the engine, reupholstered the seats, and spent hours cleaning, buffing, and waxing the exterior, preparing it for many fun-filled Saturday afternoons.

As a city girl who had had little experience with boats and water-skiing, I was anxious to share his hobby. When summer came, we made our inaugural trip to Lake Powell with his children and extended family, who also owned well-loved boats. I was the amateur in the crowd, prepared for my initial voyage with sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, and plenty of sunscreen. My friend backed the boat down the ramp, tied the boat to the dock, and asked me to watch the children while he parked the truck—it would be just a few minutes. So the kids and I jumped into the boat, put on our life jackets, and waited.

After about ten minutes, his young daughter started tugging at my arm. When I turned to her, she pointed and uttered a single word: “Look.” About three inches of water had filled the stern of the boat, and that amount was rapidly increasing. I panicked. First, I hastily lifted the children out of the boat; then I looked for something to scoop the water out. After failing to find a bucket, in desperation I grabbed a Frisbee and started frantically removing the water at a much slower rate than it was being replenished. As I watched the stern sink and the bow rise, I thought about abandoning ship, even though the boat remained securely anchored to the dock, but I held my ground after glancing up with relief at the sight of my friend.

To my surprise, instead of assisting me in removing the water he dove into the lake and started fiddling with the bottom of the boat. His head popped up a minute later, and he was smiling and laughing. Catching my befuddled look, he explained that he had forgotten to put the plug in the bilge drain. Some water always gets into the bilge from people getting in and out of the boat, so he would remove the plug after each boating trip, allowing the water to drain out and preventing any damage to the motor during storage. With the plug securely fastened and the water removed, the engine finally started, and we resumed our boating adventure. My friend was lucky: hours of maintenance before the boat was submerged could not make up for a forgotten plug once the boat was in the water. His engine could easily have been damaged beyond repair that day.

An anchor is an object that holds something firmly in place. The rope securely tied to the dock anchor kept the boat from drifting from the dock, but it did nothing to protect the motor from water unexpectedly engulfing its casing. Our testimonies can be compared to the boat. They need a firm anchor, the safest of which is a belief in the Atonement of Christ, but that alone sometimes is not enough to keep them secure in unexpected circumstances. The boat itself needs to be watertight.

Like many members of the Church, I have children who were blindsided by things that contradicted prior perceptions about gospel topics. Having come across *new* information outside of nurturing channels such as family study and Church-sponsored instruction, they felt betrayed. As their mother, I was ill equipped to answer their questions. Like my experience on the boat, the situation emerged unexpectedly, and I did not know how to address the problem. Instead of stopping the gush of water, I ineffectively tried to remove it with a poor tool. My children needed information that I didn't have.

It became apparent that I needed to not only teach my children about Christ but also some of the other issues that they would come into contact with as they left my home and set sail on their own. I decided to integrate additional material into our existing family gospel dialogue, providing a supportive environment to explore sensitive topics. Educating my teenagers on lesser-known aspects of Church history and doctrine became a priority rather than an afterthought.

Finding resources to teach the more sensitive concepts proved difficult. I didn't have the time to process lengthy scholarly articles on each topic and condense the material into a cohesive presentation for my family. What I needed was a basic primer on each of the topics, and for that I would need help. So I approached respected LDS scholars and asked if they would summarize their research not only for me and my children but also for my neighbors and fellow members of the Church. I'm not sure if it was a bold

or a desperate move, but it worked. They readily agreed that the type of book I was suggesting could be a great resource.

We are taught that the mission of the Church is to proclaim the gospel to the world, to perfect the Saints so they can receive the ordinances of the gospel, to redeem the dead, and to care for the poor and needy. With limited teaching time, the Church generally designs curriculum centered on saving principles. In addition to these basic study materials, the Church has released essays on many gospel topics and continually adds to the catalog of resources on Church websites.

In teaching the gospel to a worldwide membership, the Church cannot possibly hope to touch on every topic of interest in the level of detail that would satisfy every member. It falls upon individuals to study out for themselves and teach their families about subjects that are outside this scope. Thus prepared, members may be less inclined to let something they don't understand unravel their convictions.

This anthology enlarges the traditional LDS dialogue; it addresses criticisms of the Church and its doctrines from a faithful perspective. Within these pages, readers will explore subjects commonly referred to in Church curriculum, but with expanded material and additional context. Instead of only recounting Joseph Smith's struggle to determine which church was true and his decision to pray in a grove of trees, it describes the various accounts of the First Vision, when they were written, and why differences in wording reflect the Prophet's growing understanding of the experience. And rather than discussing the meaning of the teachings found in the Book of Abraham, readers will be presented with prevailing theories on its origin.

The tone of these chapters is straightforward. No controversies have been deliberately avoided or glossed over, but neither is there space for them to be fully explored. This is not meant as a defensive book but rather as an introduction to many topics worthy of study from an informed perspective. Most of these issues have been researched extensively by LDS scholars for decades, and readers can be comforted in knowing there are resources to turn to for direction. Discovery can be an enjoyable, enlightening, and faith-promoting experience.

This book seeks to provide the most recent research by top LDS scholars and to create a safe environment for exploration within a faithful framework. Even so, these discussions may generate thoughts and questions that might be surprising or even bothersome as existing beliefs are stretched. In fact, readers may grieve at the loss of perceptions held dear. Yet they can be consoled by the realization that their expanded understanding is based upon accurate teachings. The information in these essays can begin an exciting process of discovery for readers. As scholars provide perspective and context to both the Church's history and present policies, they also share valuable tools for lifelong learning and study. When gospel questions arise, the

antidote for uncertainty is more knowledge and more contemplation, which takes time—“even by study and also by faith.”¹ It is the continual search for truth, both secular and spiritual, that will give us a reason for faith.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

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NOTE

1. D&C 88:118.